

The masterplan that isn't – HIE's "agreed" plan for Cairngorm

Description



Photomontage of option 1 for Ptarmigan contained in undated Cairngorm Mountain; Pre-planning feasibility document

After Highlands and Enterprise announced a masterplan had been agreed for Cairngorm, without actually releasing any details of its proposals ([see here](#)), I asked for these under Freedom of Information. I was refused ([see here](#)) and on 24th April I submitted a formal review request as required under Freedom of Information procedures. Meantime, a number of other FOI requests were submitted to other Public Authorities about what information they held about the proposals for Cairngorm and the first response was from Scottish Natural Heritage (well done SNH!). Along with the [response letter](#) were over 20 MB of documents.

The information SNH has provided shows that HIE's claim that "*the CML Master Plan is commercially sensitive and cannot be published at this time*" is complete rubbish. There is NO commercially

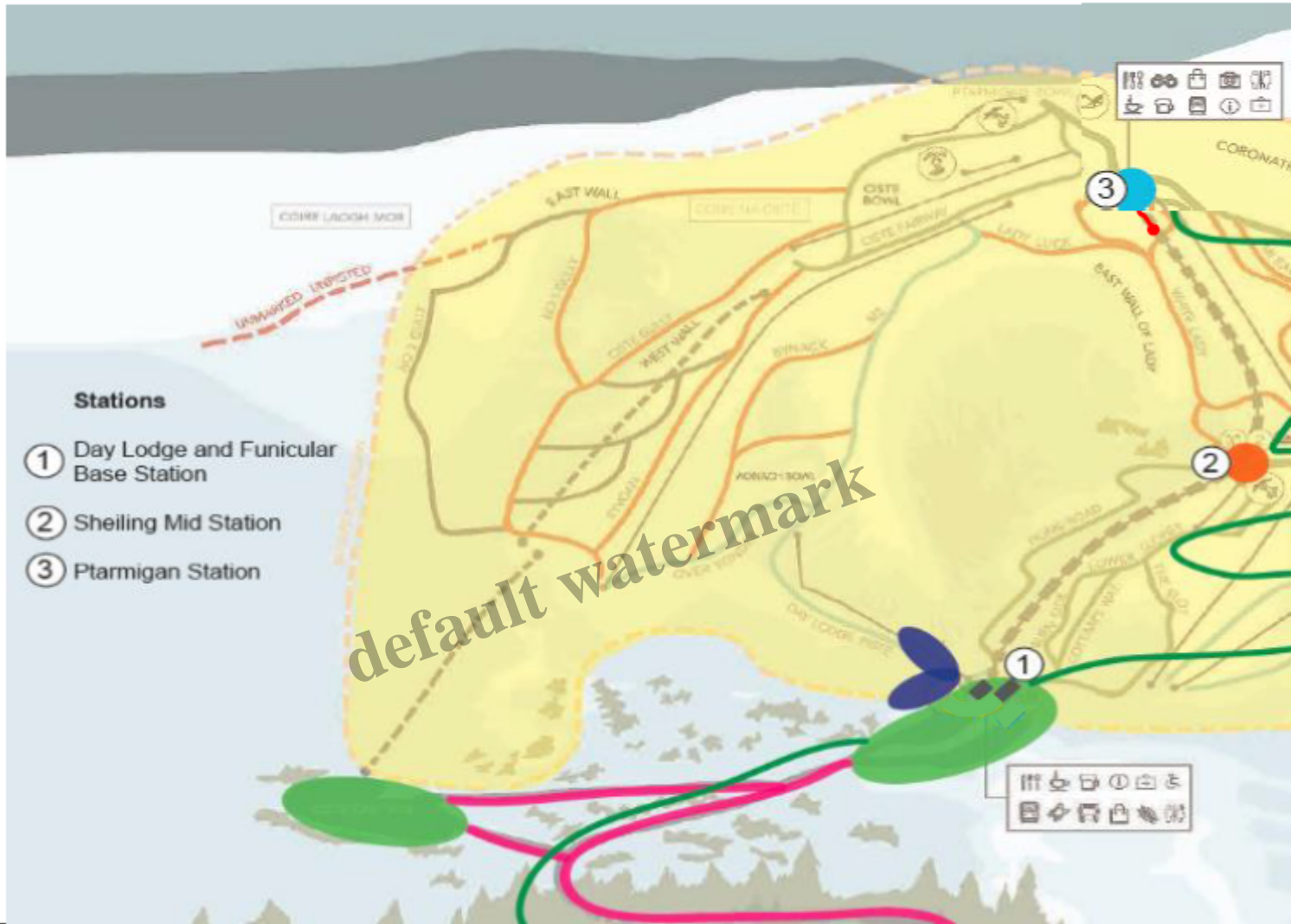
sensitive information in the document but HIE's usual modus operandi is secrecy. It appears HIE's main concern is to keep consultation about the proposals it has developed with Natural Retreats as limited as possible and to try and stitch up a deal with other public agencies before any consultation takes place. This is wrong.

Its still not possible from the FOI material to tell exactly what is being proposed at Cairngorm and, I am pretty certain, SNH and the other public authorities don't know either. This is evidenced by an extract from a letter from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to Highland Council dated 17th March 2017:

We note from the Ptarmigan Cairngorm Mountain Pre-Planning Feasibility Documentation (undated) the proposal comprises installation of an artificial ski slope and extension to the Ptarmigan Building. However, the Revised Mountain Masterplan (undated) submitted shows additional car park and landscape improvements, a new boardwalk and a Sheiling Garage Extension. The following comments apply to all these elements. We ask that the following issues are addressed prior to the submission of a planning application to avoid unnecessary delay and/or objection from us. Please note that we are very happy to review any draft assessments/information requests that we have highlighted we require below before submission alongside a planning application.

The revised masterplan mentioned in the SEPA letter appears to refer to a brochure produced by Natural Retreats (one of several) which contains this photomontage, again undated:

REVISED MOUNTAIN M



Spot the difference with the earlier version below:

MOUNTAIN MASTERPLAN OVERVIEW



Yes, the label to the green line has been removed but not the line itself!

HIE in their press release on 12th April announcing the “agreed masterplan” for Cairngorm, focused entirely on the Ptarmigan and Dry ski slope and made no mention of a funicular tunnel boardwalk, the shieling garage extension or changes to the car park contained in the “revised masterplan”. Its not clear therefore whether these are now being proposed or not.

PROPOSED MOUNTAIN BOARDWALK



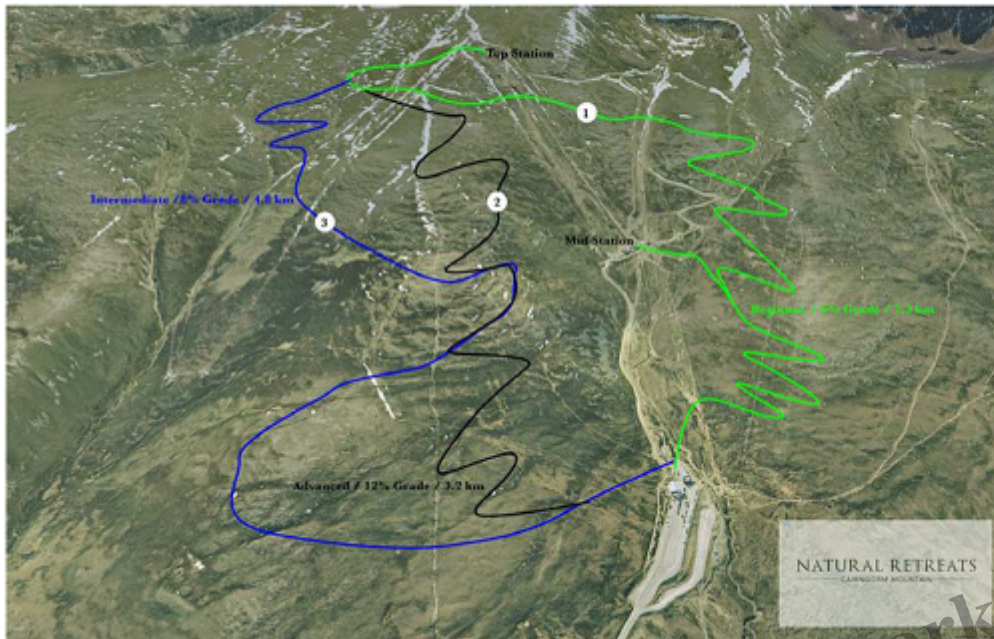
Location of mountain boardwalk as contained within earlier version of the “masterplan”

What does appear to have happened though is that proposals to develop mountain bike trails across Cairngorm have been dropped, for the time-being at least:

Having debriefed after the meetings we have decided to drop any plans for Mountain Biking from this masterplan which leaves our current plans focussing on the artificial ski slope and improvements to the Ptarmigan (email from Natural Retreats 26th October 2016)

Diagrams of what was being considered did appear in earlier versions of the “Masterplan brochures” produced by Natural Retreats:

MOUNTAIN BIKING PROPOSALS



Proposal Overview

- △ Phased development of 15.3 km of trails within ski field
- △ Targeted at recreational, families and intermediate riders
- △ Utilising Funicular as uplift
- △ Within the Ski Field
- △ Contained rider release at the Ptarmigan
- △ Designed in conjunction with Gravity Logic

Phase 1

- △ **Green** (easy) - 440m vertical descent, 6% average grade, 2m width, 7.3km length.
- △ **Blue** (Intermediate) - 380m vertical descent, 12% average grade, 1.5m width, 4.8km length.

Phase 2

- △ **Black** (advanced) - 380m vertical descent, 12% average grade, 0.5m average width, 3.2km length.

The pre-planning feasibility document is focussed on the two new developments announced by HIE, an extension to the Ptarmigan and a dry ski slope, which suggests it is the most up to date document about what is being proposed. It also contains a statement which suggests that HIE and Natural Retreats are no longer proposing any proper masterplan as such:

8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A formal screening request was submitted for the wider development and was received 26 January 2016. The response notes that an EIA is recommended with the recommendations of further study to appropriately assess potential impacts.

Now normally a masterplan would require an Environment Impact Assessment – Flamingo Land is producing one for Balloch ([see here](#)) – so no EIA, no masterplan. HOWEVER, the screening

response referred to is NOT on the Highland Council Planning portal although there is a decision letter dated 24th February 2016 [screening opinion coire cas](#), which contains this statement (the capitals are as per the letter) which is very clear:

Screening Opinion

*It is considered that **Environmental Impact Assessment IS required** for the development described in the letter and information accompanying your screening request.*

I hope that the Cairngorms National Park Authority will support this and insist a proper Environmental Impact Assessment is submitted before any planning applications are considered but also that a plan is produced for the whole mountain. What needs to be avoided is a situation where Natural Retreats and HIE come back with additional proposals, such as mountain bike trails, at a later date. There needs to be a comprehensive plan for Cairngorm.

One thing the material does show is that whatever is actually being proposed, the “project” its well

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behind schedule:

PROPOSE

	2016				
	A	S	O	N	D
Planning Meeting (CNP, H Council, HIE & NR) - see note 1		★			
Prepare and submit detailed planning application					
Plans approved by HIE before submission					★
Planning Decision					
Artificial Ski Slope					
Ground Preparation					
Slope Construction, Snowflex installation and lift installation					
Commence Operations					
Mountain Biking					
Green & Blue Trail Construction - see note 2					
Signage installation, retail set up and base area set up					
Funicular Trolley Purchase or modification					
Commence Operations					
Black Trail Construction					
Ptarmigan					
Detailed Design					
Tender					
External Build - see note 3					
Internal Fit Out - see note 4					
Final finishing and knock through - see note 5					
Commence Operations					
Landscaping, Car parking Improvements, signage and wayfinding					

I will cover the proposed new developments – which are to be financed through a £4m loan from HIE – in detail in a future post. Meantime here is a photomontage of the design and location of the proposed dry ski slopes (there is also a green option). Comments welcome!

Snowflex



Cairngorm Mountain: pre-planning feasibility document

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Freedom of Information
3. HIE
4. natural retreats
5. planning

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